Number Seven

CRIMINAL™

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image®

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Criminal

Cruel Summer

Part Three

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Must Be This Tall to Ride

Ricky Lawless was ruining the **campaign** and he knew it.
Ever since he got out of ***juvie***, he didn't care about ***D&D*** or any of that stuff.
...OKAY, SO THE INNKEEPER SAYS...
WOULD YE LIKE A ROOM FOR THE NIGHT?

C'MON, MAN...

I'M SERIOUS. WHY NOT?

BECAUSE WE'RE THERE TO GET INFORMATION.

LET'S GO, JACOB... I'M READY TO ROLL.

I'M USING MY ENCHANTED DAGGER. IT'S PLUS-FOUR AGAINST INNOCENTS.

ENOUGH.

WHAT?

I ASK THE INNKEEPER IF HE'S SEEN KILLGRAVE PALLADAR.

AYE, WANDERER, HE SAYS...

MASTER PALLADAR STAYED IN ROOM FOUR, UPSTAIRS, NOT THREE NIGHTS AGO...

OKAY, THEN -

I TELL HIM TO BRING US SOME BROTHEL WENCHES, ON THE DOUBLE.

THE INNKEEPER HITS YOU IN THE FACE WITH A TENTH LEVEL *WAND OF HOLDING*. YOU'RE FROZEN IN PLACE AND YOU *CAN'T* TALK.

HEY - *FUCK YOU!*

IF YOU'RE GONNA KEEP -

MY GUY'S *CHAOTIC NEUTRAL*, I'M IN *CHARACTER!*

OH, *BULLSHIT!*

SCREW *THIS*... I'M OUTTA HERE.

SERIOUSLY?!

JENNY - *WAIT*. YOU GUYS ARE JUST ABOUT TO GET ANOTHER PIECE OF THE *RUNE STONE*...

THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID TWO *HOURS* AGO...

I'M LATE FOR DINNER ANYWAY.

OH, *COME ON*, JEN - I'M JUST *MESSIN' AROUND!*

YEAH, YOU'RE *REAL* HILARIOUS...

NOT.

HAPPY NOW?

OH... WHATEVER. IT'S JUST A GAME.

WE CAN FINISH IT *NEXT* WEEK.

FUCK *YOU*. I SPENT A LOT OF *TIME* ON THIS...

MAN, *CHILL OUT*...

LET'S JUST GET OUT OF HERE... GO *DO* SOMETHING.

YOU CAN GO DO WHATEVER YOU *WANT*...

I'M STAYING HERE.

FINE. C'MON, LEO...

I SHOULD PROBABLY BE GETTING HOME, TOO.

FUCK THAT... DON'T BE *LAME*.

FUCK GOING *HOME*.

Ricky had never liked his own home... Not even as a little kid.

But now it was even worse.

SO... WHAT DO YOU WANNA DO?

I DON'T KNOW... LET'S GO *DOWNTOWN*...

His dad had shown up with some ***woman*** a week ago, and everything was changing.

THIS IS ***JANE***, SHE'S GONNA BE ***STAYIN'*** WITH US FOR A WHILE...

NICE TO MEET YOU... YOUR DAD'S TOLD ME ABSOLUTELY ***NOTHING*** ABOUT YOU.

They made Ricky put on a suit and tie and go to some fancy restaurant, like a normal family...

Then Teeg told him they were all moving into a new house. Someplace nicer, in a better part of town...

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT *THAT*, CHAMP?

CHAMP?

Ricky didn't know how they could afford that, since they'd just paid a bunch of ***back rent***... But it seemed pointless to argue.

YEAH, SURE... SOUNDS GOOD.

His dad was acting like a totally different person.

Didn't care about money...

KEEP THE CHANGE, MAN.

And smiling all the time... Which just looked wrong, like no one had ever taught him how to do it.

He even lit Jane's cigarettes.

It made Ricky feel sick to his stomach.

SO, RICK... WHAT ARE ***YOU*** INTO? YOU LIKE ***PUNK ROCK?*** NEW WAVE?

YOU LOOK LIKE KIND OF A PUNKER...

Pfft -- NO ONE SAYS ***PUNKER.***

The mean streak, the violence, was still inside Teeg, he could see that...

HEY. CAREFUL WITH THAT TONE.

But it was tempered now, or buried.

IT'S FINE, TEEG... I WAS JUST TESTING HIM...

I KNOW NO ONE COOL SAYS PUNKER.

SURE... RIGHT...

WHY DON'T WE SWING BY A RECORD SHOP ON THE WAY HOME? I COULD SHOW YOU SOME STUFF...

I BET YOU NEVER EVEN HEARD OF JOY DIVISION.

WHO?

EXACTLY...

C'MON, LET'S HAVE SOME FUN...

YOU CAN'T HATE ME FOREVER, KID.

The thing was, he didn't hate Jane.

He just hated what she was doing to his father.

For all his faults, Teeg Lawless had been the one constant in Ricky's life.

And in some ways, he didn't even consider the drinking and violence to be faults.

They were just part of who Teeg was... What it meant to be a Lawless.

When Ricky was little, his older brother Tracy would go on the road with their dad sometimes...

While Ricky stayed home to watch their mother drink herself into a coma.

And the only thing that held him together was knowing Teeg would be back in a week or maybe two, and everything would go back to their version of normal.

Brooding silences. Violence. Jail.

He had a father with a dangerous reputation... And it made him feel tough. Like he could survive anything.

But now, watching him with this new woman, trying to be someone he wasn't... It was the first time Ricky ever felt sorry for his dad.

The first time he realized that Teeg was just as human and stupid as he was...

And that scared the hell out of him.

But still, he didn't hate Jane for that.

If anything, he hated himself for how much he ***didn't*** hate her... Because he really ***wanted*** to.

SO, HOW OLD IS SHE?

I DON'T KNOW, LIKE... AT LEAST 32. MAYBE OLDER.

IS SHE ***HOT?***

YEAH... BETTER THAN MY ***DAD*** DESERVES, THAT'S FOR SURE.

AND SHE'S ***SCREWING*** HIM ALL THE TIME...

LIKE EVEN IN THE ***AFTERNOON*** AN' SHIT.

SERIOUSLY?

ARE THEY LOUD?

SOMETIMES... YEAH.

I'M NOT SURE IF THEY DON'T KNOW I'M HOME... OR IF SHE JUST DOESN'T CARE.

HERE... THIS ONE. THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE ASHTRAY.

OKAY.

Ricky knew Leo's father wouldn't approve of this.

"Petty crimes, committed in public, are a stupid risk," he could hear him saying.

But to Ricky, the risk was part of the fun.

And fuck having *rules* for how to break the law, he thought.

GOT IT.

JACKPOT.

THERE'S LIKE FOUR BUCKS IN HERE.

SO WHAT, WE'VE GOT THIRTEEN DOLLARS NOW?

FOURTEEN... WE CAN GET A TWELVE-PACK...

OR LIKE A SMALL BOTTLE OF SOMETHING...

WHAT ABOUT VODKA? SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T SMELL...

I CAN'T GO HOME REEKING OF BOOZE.

FUCK THAT, I HATE VODKA.

JUST SWIPE SOME TIC-TACS, MAN.

HEY MISTER - HEY!
WILL YOU BUY US SOME WHISKEY?
LIQUOR
LIQUOR • WINE
KEG BEER
DISCOUNT CIGARETTES
BEER WINE

YOU CAN KEEP THE CHANGE.
YOU GUYS SHOULDN'T BE FISHING OUT HERE... COPS DRIVE BY ALL THE TIME.

THERE'S NO COPS NOW.
C'MON, MAN...

SORRY.

MAYBE TRY THOSE JUNKIES OVER THERE...

LOTTO
JUST BE CAREFUL THEY DON'T GIVE YOU AIDS.

THIS SUCKS... WHERE THE FUCK ARE ALL THE FUCKING SAILORS?

HERE... GIVE ME THE MONEY.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

YOU CAN'T GET AIDS FROM TALKING TO A JUNKIE.

Look at that. Leo - *Captain Careful* - walking right up to the sketchy dope fiends.

Every now and then he really surprises Ricky.

HEY, WILL ONE OF YOU BUY US A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY?

YOU CAN KEEP THE CHANGE...

But that isn't the *only* surprise he gets right then...

WHAT...?

PROBABLY BE ABOUT *THREE BUCKS*, THE CHANGE.

YOU CAN BUY YOURSELF SOME CIGARETTES.

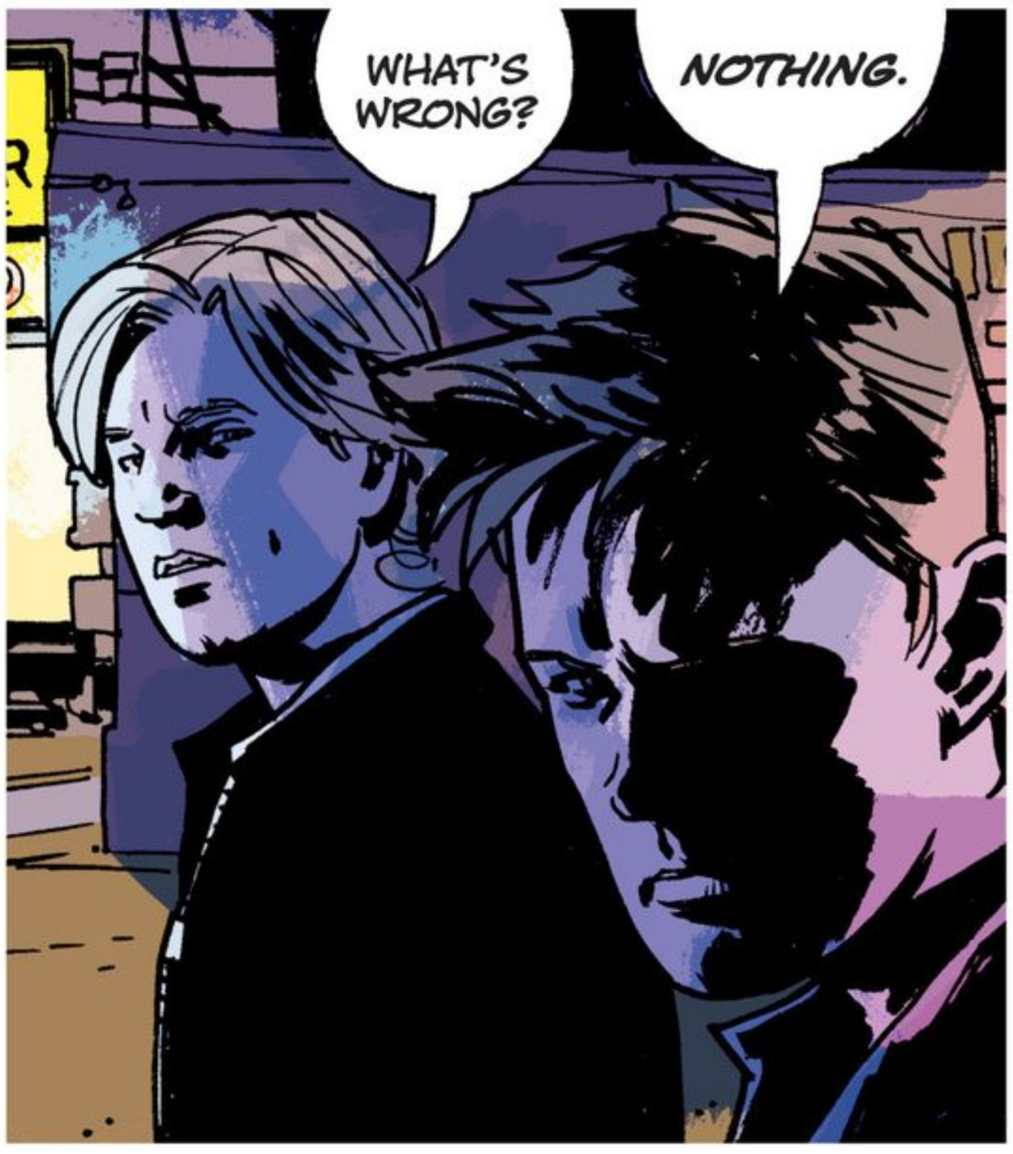
OKAY... I GUESS THAT'S A GOOD DEAL...

I'LL BE BACK IN A MINUTE...

WHAT'RE YOU LOOKIN' AT, KID?
YOU GOT A PROBLEM?

NO.

THEN STOP LOOKIN' AT ME.


WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING.

He doesn't even recognize me, Ricky thinks.
And then he thinks maybe it's not the same guy...
C'MON... LET'S GO WAIT OUTSIDE THE STORE...

But it is... It's ***him***.

He'll never forget that scar. That broken tooth.

YOU KNOW THEY'RE HAVING A ***MEETING*** TOMORROW...

MY DAD, IZZY KURTZ... YOUR DAD AND THAT LADY.

YEAH, I HEARD THEM TALKING ABOUT IT.

YOU GOT ANY IDEA WHAT THE JOB IS GONNA BE? SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING BIG.

NAH... TEEG HASN'T SAID SHIT.

It's the same guy...

And he doesn't even ***remember*** Ricky.

MY DAD THINKS JANE HAS CLEANED TEEG UP.

YOU'RE ***CUTE***... I ***LIKE*** YOU.

SAID SHE'S GIVEN HIM "***FOCUS***."

I THINK HE'S IMPRESSED.

Pffft - HE WOULD BE...

OH SHIT - THERE'S COPS DOWN THERE.
WATCH OUT.

WHAT ARE THEY DOING?
WHO KNOWS...
BUT DON'T LET THEM SEE YOU.

FUCKIN' PIGS.
SERIOUSLY... STAY BACK, MAN.

JUST BE COOL, OKAY?
YEAH, YEAH...

Y'KNOW, I'VE SEEN HER NAKED... *JANE.*

SERIOUSLY?

YEAH. SHE WALKS AROUND WITH NO CLOTHES ON SOMETIMES AFTER THEY *DO IT.*

NO WAY.

YES WAY.

This was a lie.

Jane had dashed from Teeg's room to the bathroom two nights ago, but all Ricky had seen was a blur in the dark.

BULLSHIT.

IT'S TRUE!

NO. YOU WOULDA SAID SOMETHING *BEFORE.*

I KNOW YOU.

FUCK YOU!

YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT!

PSSSH

HEY -- !

HEY - HEY, YOU FUCKING SHITBIRDS!

GET DOWN FROM THERE!

THE COPS, ASSHOLE!

WHO CARES?

FUCK OFF, PIGS!

KRRSSH

SUCK MY DICK!

WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?!

NOTHING.

COME ON... RUN, IDIOT!!

YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE...

This was when Ricky Lawless was most alive... When he was running from trouble he'd created.

Running from consequence.

STOP RUNNING, YOU LITTLE FUCKS!

WE'RE GONNA BREAK YOUR FUCKING LEGS!

It was when he felt the most like his father, although he never understood ***why*** Teeg caused so much trouble to run from...

Just that he did.

YOU MOTHER-FUCKERS!

YOU'RE DEAD! BOTH OF YOU!

But in the running, there was a thrill...

Like nothing else he had ever known.

DO YOU HEAR ME?! FUCKING DEAD!

You existed in the breeze and the laughter and the chase...

Not knowing if you would make it or not.

Yet never feeling more free.

But tonight is different.

He's just running because it's what he ***always*** does.

...YOU'RE CUTE...

WAIT - I DON'T THINK THEY'RE *CHASING* US ANY-

RICKY!

And for a second, he's not sure he ***wants*** to make it this time...

Or if he really doesn't care.

But then he collides with the other side...

Ooff -- !!

JESUS FUCKING CHRIST!

...And it doesn't matter again.

COME ON... JUMP ACROSS.

YOU'RE INSANE.

THAT'S TEN FEET, AT LEAST...

DON'T BE A WUSS... IT'S EASY.

FUCK THIS... I'M GOING HOME...

WHILE I STILL CAN.

FINE! BE LIKE THAT - PUSSY!
GO HOME TO YOUR DADDY!
...FUCK...
FUCK...

Back at the new house, he can hear Teeg and Jane going at it before he even gets to the kitchen door.

He listens for a while, wondering how long it'll go on.

Everything here is better than the shithole they moved out of, the home he spent half his life avoiding.

But this place isn't a home at all...

It's just some house they can't afford.

Someone else's life.

...MOTHERFUCKERS...

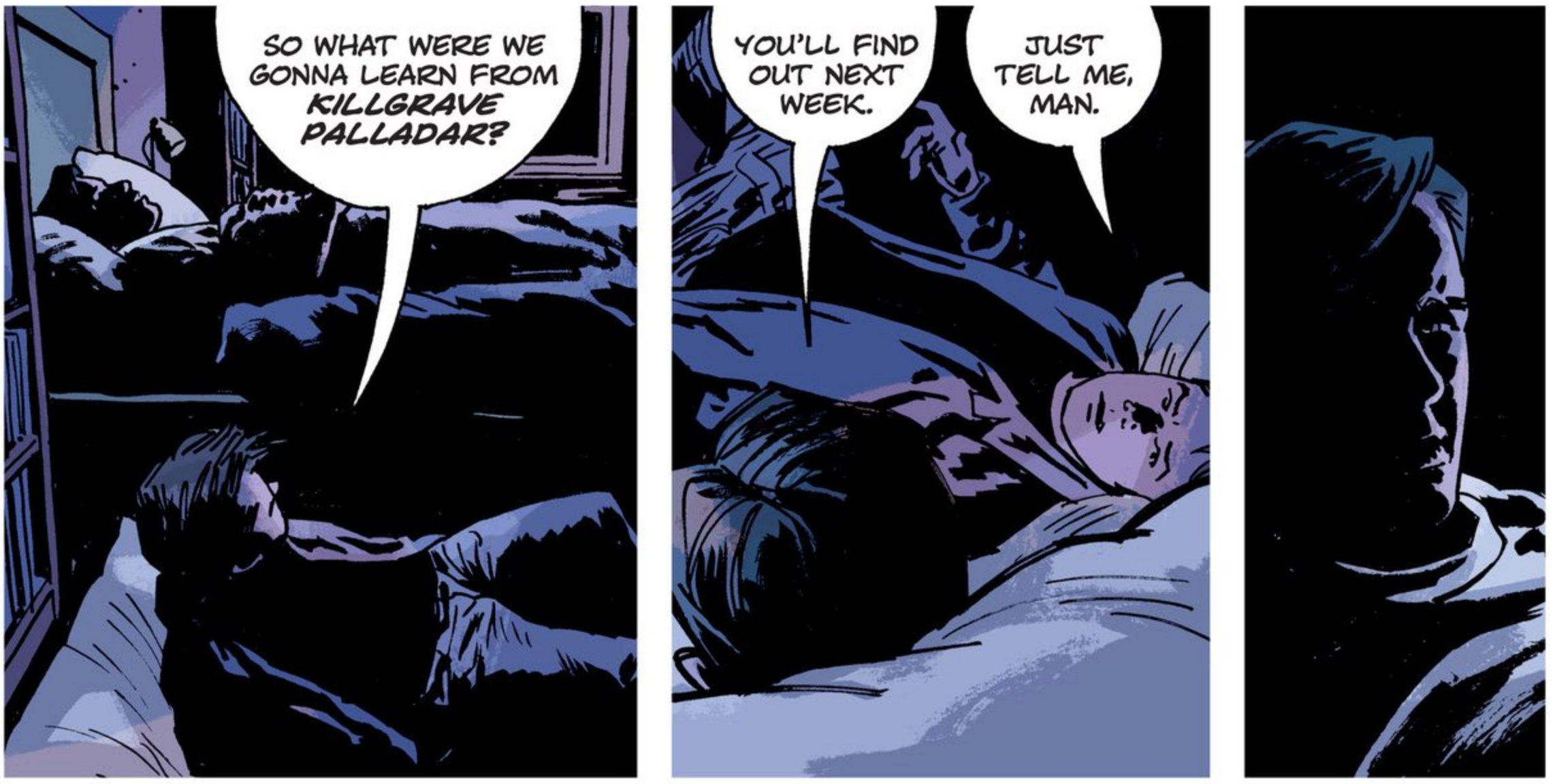
...hhh...

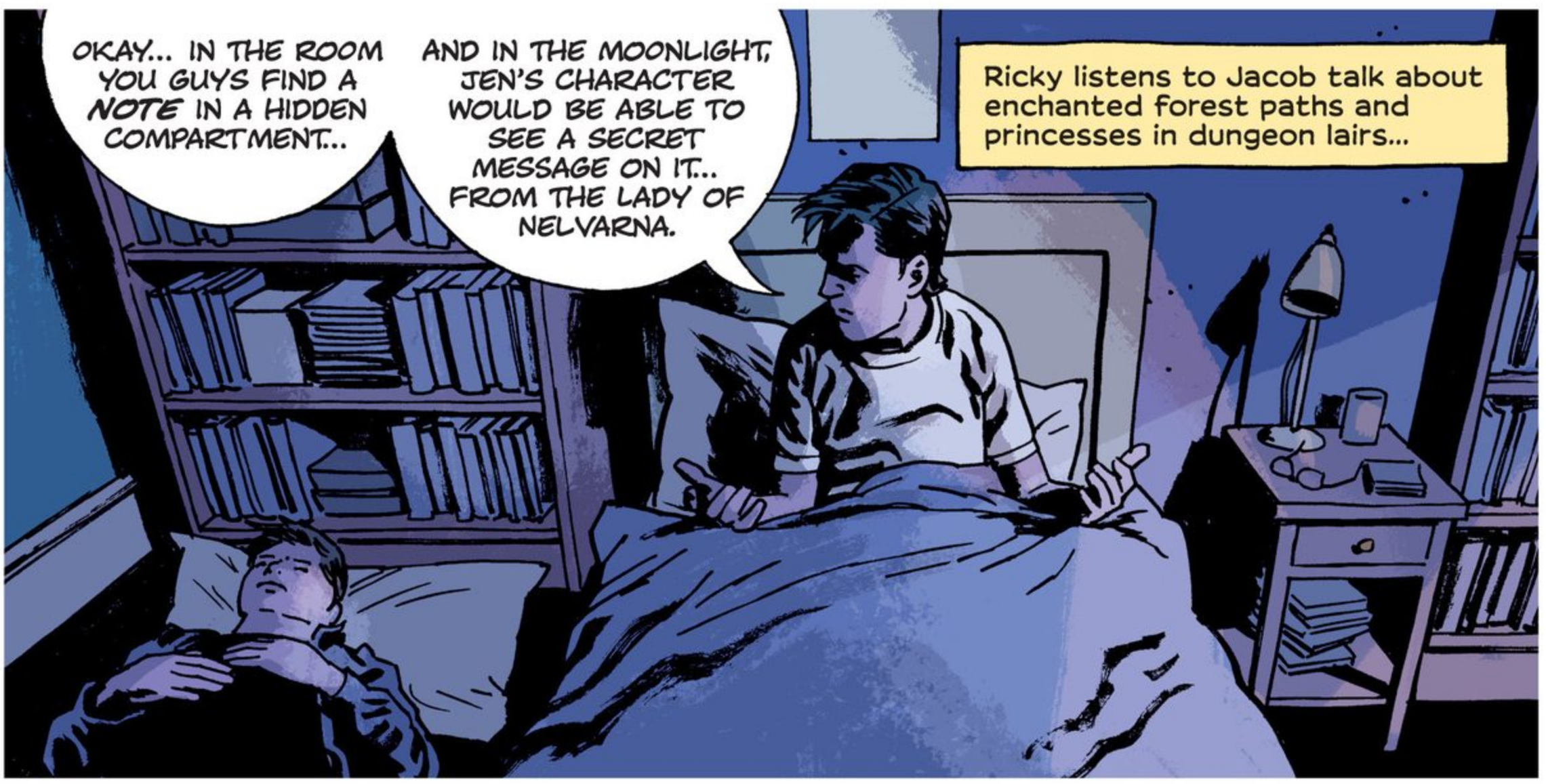
WHAT'S GOING ON...?
CAN I CRASH HERE?

YEAH, WHATEVER.
BUT NO SMOKING IN MY ROOM.
OKAY.

HERE...

SORRY I WRECKED D&D.




OKAY... IN THE ROOM YOU GUYS FIND A NOTE IN A HIDDEN COMPARTMENT...
AND IN THE MOONLIGHT, JEN'S CHARACTER WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE A SECRET MESSAGE ON IT... FROM THE LADY OF NELVARNA.
Ricky listens to Jacob talk about enchanted forest paths and princesses in dungeon lairs...

And he misses the days when he cared about things like that.
ND THEN AT THE ABLES, IT TURN IT ONE OF YOU RSES HAS BEE OSSESSED BY A DAEMON...
O BEFORE YOU CA EVEN GET TO THE REST OF WYR YOU HAVE TO DO A EXORCISM...
And just before he falls asleep, he wonders if Jacob's dad still hides his gun in the same place.

To Be Continued

Okay, and that wraps up our third part of CRUEL SUMMER. As you can see from how we're telling this story, you're meant to be reading closely and filling in some of the blanks yourself, as the different characters' stories overlap a bit, or time goes back and forth between them. This one is going to go to issue #12, too, so we're not even to the halfway point yet. And it's just going to get more fucked up from here on in.

The Secret Ingredient is Crime

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I'm writing this the day after Comicon, where I did a bunch of signings at the Image booth and met a lot of readers and retailers and press people, and spent four days roaming around from convention to dinners and hotel bars with old friends. It was a lot of fun, even for someone who hates crowds. But I hadn't been in a few years, and having basically grown up at it, I felt a strong sense of nostalgia there this year. Stayed up way too late every night, and got nothing done, but it was worth it. And thanks to everyone who came out.

And at the Eisner Awards, we won BEST ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL for MY HEROES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN JUNKIES, which was amazing. Here is the award, in the office of my publisher/editor Eric Stephenson, where I have ordered him to build a shrine, clearly. (Just kidding).

We've been very lucky over the years, but I'm never jaded to winning or even being nominated for these. It means a lot, especially since we've been at this a little while. Congrats to all the winners (which was mostly Tom King and Mitch Gerads) and nominees, if they're reading this.

***

VERONICA MARS is back. Longtime readers will know of my love for this show. It started out as a dark and brutal high school teen detective show, and now she's in her 30s and back on the detective beat, as snarky and mean and messed up as ever. It's somewhere between noir and something like BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER – tonally, there are no monsters – and is just charming enough to pull that off. So go to HULU and check out the new season.

***

Here's an email from reader Ian Ferguson...

I was reading the two latest issues of **Criminal** *and started to contemplate if the culture at large has lost something by craving a successful novel (graphic or otherwise) be adapted into a TV show or a movie, as some sort of validation to the world. (How*

many people when asked about every work from **The Wizard of Oz** *to* **Casino Royale** *think of the books they started as?)*

I would like to think that a work can stand on its own and doesn't require adaptation to be considered a success. I think some of the tension arising from popular culture is that some cultural gatekeeping occurs when a latest superhero blockbuster doesn't coincide with the wishes of men-children who feel they are the reason for the work's success. Remember the "outrage" 17 years ago at organic webshooters for Raimi's Spiderman? (Full disclosure I am in the demographic of the men-children).

I respected how Alan Moore completely detached himself from his most notorious works when they were adapted. Mr. Brubaker, how do you feel about the adaptation quandary as a creator who is now dipping his toe into TV, particularly working on Michael Crichton's **Westworld***? Are you comfortable with compromise in the name of a bigger audience?*

Thanks for the letter, Ian. I actually don't remember the outrage over the organic webshooters, but I try as hard as possible to ignore fan outrage on the internet, even way back then. But what you mention is something that I and other writers talk about from time to time – like, why do we as a culture (and I do it too sometimes) feel like a book isn't a success unless someone makes it into a film or TV show? I'm not sure if it's really that cut and dried, of course, but sometimes it does feel like that. There are a lot of big books (graphic and not) that haven't been adapted into anything, really, but right now the way the studios are gobbling up "IP" to build their vertically integrated empires it does seem like that vibe is out there more than ever.

As for my view on adaptation of our work? It's hard to say. I don't sit down to write our books thinking, "this'll make a great movie someday!" I just focus on the story as a comic when I'm writing it, and if that's all it ever is, I'm more than happy. I get to write these comics for a living, and that's amazing. But I also think the books will always stand on their own, even if any of them someday got turned into something else. And I'm certainly not opposed to any of our books being adapted – but I am getting more hands-on about how it's done. Some of the previous attempts have gotten so far away from the source material at times that it felt really pointless.

Still, I'm not sure I see it as a compromise to turn a book into a film. As Chandler said, when asked about Hollywood ruining his books, "The books are still right there on the shelf." (Or something like that). It's just a choice you make, and I think most writers go into it knowing things will change, and we just cross our fingers that the spirit of the work will come through, in spite of that. Like your example, WESTWORLD. I'm not sure what Crichton would have thought about that show, but I do know that his work was discussed a lot in the room, and his ideas, and that the film he made was still spiritually in there (including the original Man in Black replica in the basement) but the focus of the idea was changed to be about the AI, not the guests. I think it took the basic ideas of what Crichton did very seriously, though. And I'm sure millions more people went back and watched the original film because of that show. I bet Michael Crichton would have been happy about that.

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This month in our back pages, Kim Morgan brings us a great piece about one of my all-time favorite films, RUMBLE FISH, with illustrations by Sean, as usual.

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Write us with questions or comments at: criminalcomic@gmail.com and we'll be back next month with issue #8, which will look like that cover on the next page there. To your right.

by
Kim Morgan
illustrated by
Sean Phillips

Rumble Fish

Hours are like diamonds, don't let them waste
Time waits for no one; no favors has he
Time waits for no one, and he won't wait for me

– The Rolling Stones

Time. Once you hit the teen mark in life – what a beautiful horrible time that is. Dreamy and crazy and banal and violent – in action or in mind – melodramatic and real and hormonally addled. In the case of Rusty James – not so smart, but often intensely poetic – in movement, in words, in the way you look at your surroundings – be it your drunken dad's apartment, your girlfriend's intelligent beautiful face, your older brother's odd, sad, sleepwalking swagger, and listening to that older brother even if you don't understand half of what he says. And then there's those brightly colored rumble fish in the pet store… they need to be free. And they have very little time.

Francis Ford Coppola's *Rumble Fish* presents and ponders these dreamlike feelings of teen-hood as an expressionistic mood piece – a reverie that feels of this world and out of this world, but so rooted in an emotional truth that, at times, it feels Shakespearean. It's a beauty of black and white cinematography (by Stephen H. Burum) as if Orson Welles took over both Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* and Don Siegel's *Crime in the Streets* but infused them with F.W. Murnau and, of course, Coppola. Deep focus, Dutch angles, bold, abstract camera moves, dark wet streets, a rumble so balletic that it was indeed choreographed by San Francisco Ballet director, Michael Smuin – *Rumble Fish* is a stylistic wonder, but rich with feeling that's embedded right in that style. According to Burum (from American Cinematographer):

"For reference points, the first picture that Francis wanted us to look at was the Anatole Litvak film, Decision Before Dawn… Decision was a picture about spies in postwar Europe and it was actually shot on location in about 1946. What he wanted Dean Tavolouris to see was its images of ruined cities. That was where all the smoke and obscurity in Rumble Fish came from. He wanted to give the feeling that these kids were operating in a wasteland. It was partial destruction with a leanness in the way things looked. In all, it reflects the mental state of the characters and the chaos in their world. Another picture that we looked at was Johnny Belinda that Ted McCord [ASC] shot. We did look at some of the German Expressionist films such as The Last Laugh by F.W. Murnau. Francis showed it to the actors, because he wanted more body attitude out of the kids. Emil Jannings' posture in The Last Laugh becomes more and more forlorn as he is beaten down by life. So Francis way trying to get across to them, especially to Matt Dillon, how important body language was. Even in silent acting you could project that kind of feeling so strongly. We looked at Viva Zapata and Orson Welles' Macbeth."

But, for sure, this is a Coppola film through and through – a masterpiece – there has been no other teen film like *Rumble Fish* (released in 1983) – before or since. Coppola was so ahead of his time here, so experimental and unafraid, that the film remains timeless (as does the brilliant, evocative percussive-based score by Stewart Copeland).

For years the picture was misunderstood (though it had its defenders, like Roger Ebert, and it's much more respected now, with an impressive Criterion edition). But some baffled critics seem to adamantly *not* understand – as if they resented the filmmaker for making an art film out of a young adult S.E. Hinton novel. The *great* S.E. Hinton, who co-wrote the screenplay with Coppola and who (of course) also wrote the novel, *The Outsiders*, which was Coppola's other Tulsa teen film made before *Rumble Fish* – both released the same year.

What a year, Coppola so suffused with beautiful rebel youth. He dedicated *Rumble Fish* to his older brother, August. This was personal for him.

Hinton's Rusty James was only 14 in her novel, his older brother, Motorcycle Boy was 17. In the film Rusty James (Matt Dillon) is in his later teens and Motorcycle Boy (Mickey Rourke) is 21. That's old to a teenager. But Motorcycle Boy was an old 17 in Hinton's novel and he's an even older 21 in Coppola's movie – a haunted young man whose hearing comes and goes, who is colorblind, and who has seen and felt more than he says, speaking quietly and often with literary references that only their book smart but dipsomaniacal father (Dennis Hopper) understands. Rusty James beseeches them to "talk normal" because he feels left out. He wants to be like his brother. He wants to belong, especially after his mother has split to California. But he's not like his older brother. And probably not like his mother either. As his old man says:

"No, your mother… is not crazy. And neither, contrary to popular belief, is your brother crazy. He's merely miscast in a play. He was born in the wrong era, on the wrong side of the river… With the ability to be able to do anything that he wants to do and… findin' nothin' that he wants to do. I mean nothing."

Wrong side of the river – we first think wrong side of the tracks – but river feels so much more mythological, so much more symbolic than that – it's movement, it's time – and Motorcycle Boy wants to flow. As Rusty James says in Hinton's novel, "I couldn't picture the Motorcycle Boy in California, by the ocean. He liked rivers, not oceans." In the movie Rusty James compares Motorcycle Boy to the Pied Piper, that the guys in town would have followed him anywhere, "Yeah, they'd all follow me to the river, huh?" Motorcycle Boy says, "And jump in?"

Motorcycle Boy has been gone a few months – in California, he says – but returns when Rusty James rumbles with Biff Wilcox – he returns quite dramatically. Recovering from a fight wound, the brothers hang out while Rusty James' friend Steve (Vincent Spano) remarks on the older brother's appearance – as if he can't hear him: "He looks so old I forget he's just 21." Rusty replies, "Yeah, that's pretty old."

That is pretty old to a teenager – and Rourke's Motorcycle Boy does look and seem appropriately older – he's cool, maybe crazy to others, but also dignified, "Royalty in exile." It's as if he's in on some secret only he understands, and it feels like… the end. You feel a pall of death hanging over him. And you feel it for young Rusty James too – unless he escapes. Will he? Rusty James says: "Man, I feel like I'm wasting my life waiting for something. Waiting for what? I wish I had a reason to leave, man."

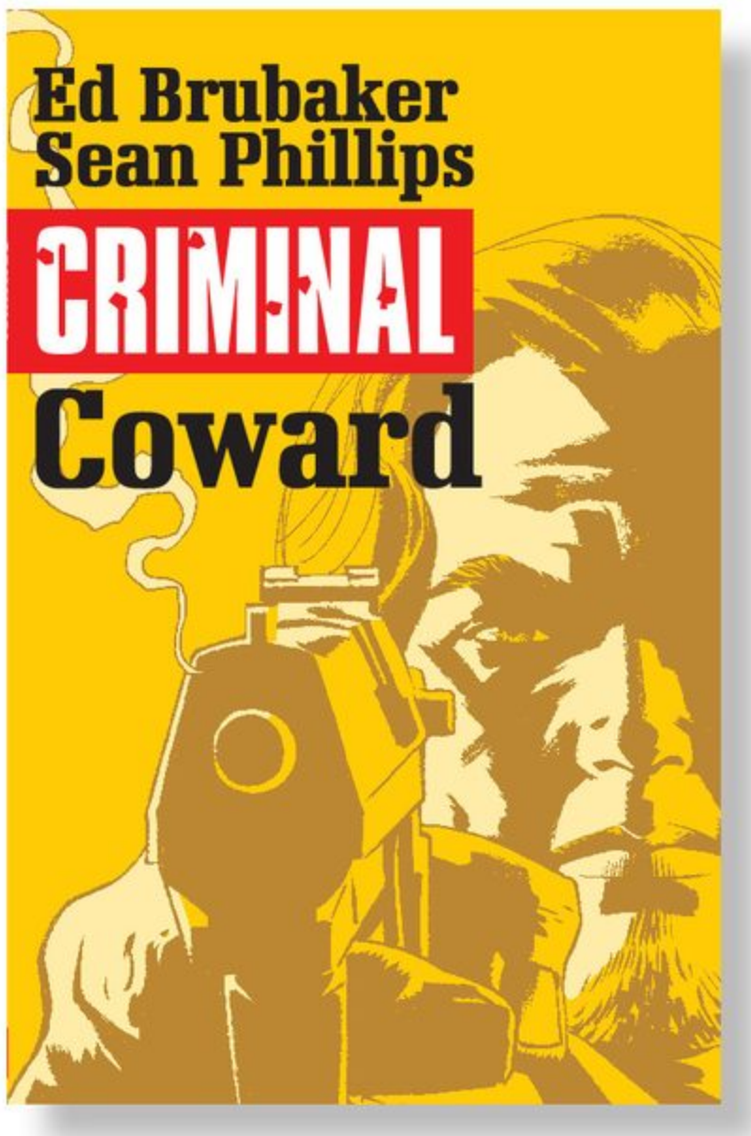
Rusty James has time ticking all around him – literally conveyed by the ticking score, the clocks spied in different scenes, and a broken old clock hitched up to a truck in town – Rusty James and Motorcycle Boy lean against it as Patterson the Cop (William Smith), with his ominous mustache and sunglasses (he's the personification of both The Man and institutionalized soul-crushing) picks at Motorcycle Boy again, as if he's not standing right there. Rusty James asks the cop why he hates him so much: "I hate him so much, because you kids think he's something he's not. He's no hero." Rusty quite reasonably counters with: "Like you are! You're a hero, right?"

Patterson the Cop is not a hero. He's more like the Grim Reaper – death is at their door – and he'll sure as hell be a part of it somehow. Rusty James' death? His brother's death? The death of adolescence? The Grim Reaper lays in wait. In a spectacular near-death sequence, Rusty James goes out of body and floats over the town, spying how people would feel if he were dead. Did he mean anything? You wonder if his brother would wonder that. Probably not. He doesn't seem to care anymore what people think, and that makes him "dangerous" and "crazy" to the soul-crushers – he's in his own world. And it's Motorcycle Boy who really seems like he's floating, out of body, near death, throughout the entire movie.

If there's a Grim Reaper, there's also a Guardian Angel (as the actor himself, Laurence Fishburne, described himself), and the movie opens with Fishburne's sharp-looking character, Midget – dressed in white jacket and white hat – walking into the diner/billiard hall to warn Rusty James: "Biff Wilcox is looking for you… Says he's gonna kill you." Death is already waiting. Time is key – it means something to the director. As Coppola described (in "The Making of Rumble Fish") right after Midget warns Rusty James: "And from that moment until the end, time is running out on this character…"

And it is. Time is tension in *Rumble Fish*. The boy's father may show how long you can hold on as a booze-hound, as if old age is forever, but youth? Youth is short, even if your summers feel long. Friends and girlfriends, and the sad junkie Cassandra, and Benny from the diner (actors Nicolas Cage, Chris Penn, Diane Lane, Diana Scarwid and Tom Waits – all fantastic here) are there and will likely come and go. But moments mean something – like when Motorcycle Boy rides Rusty James on his bike at night – a loving, gorgeous sequence of brothers just being – two young men feeling like they are anywhere else but there. For some minutes.

Motorcycle Boy may have been about the river, but by the end, Rusty James makes it to the ocean. And it's beautiful to see that he's gone that far – and on his brother's motorcycle. The ocean feels like either the end of the line or the beginning of the story – where the river meets the sea – and that's either life or death for Rusty James. We hope life.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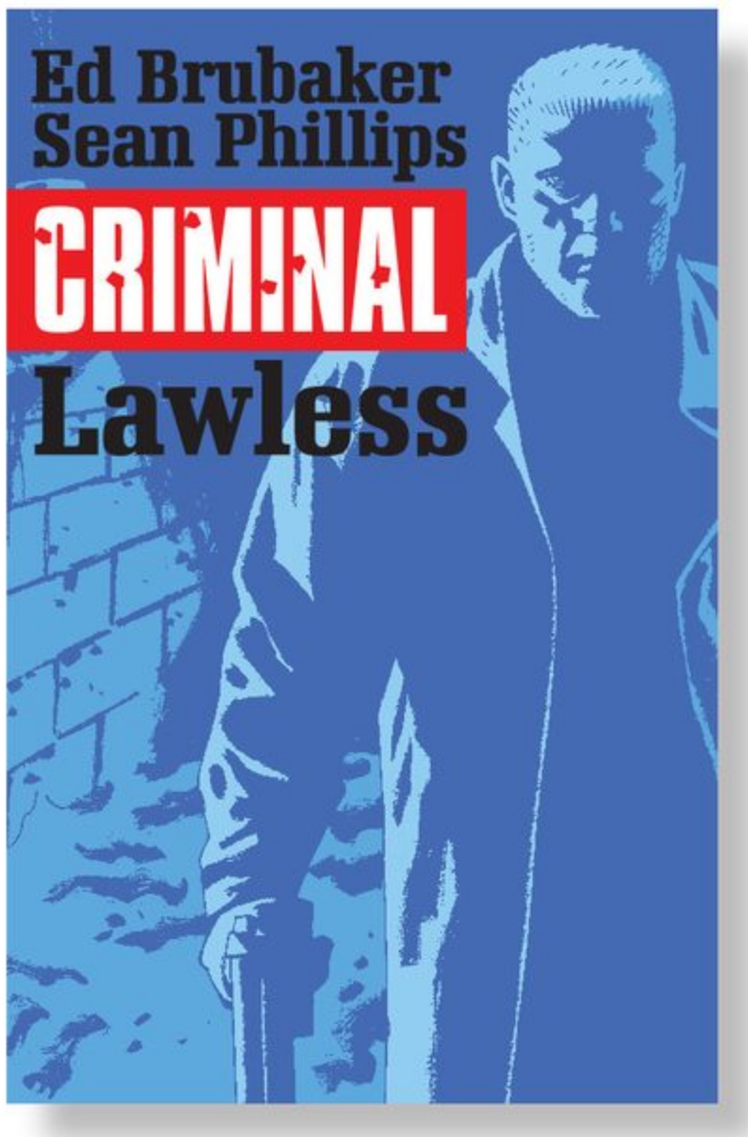
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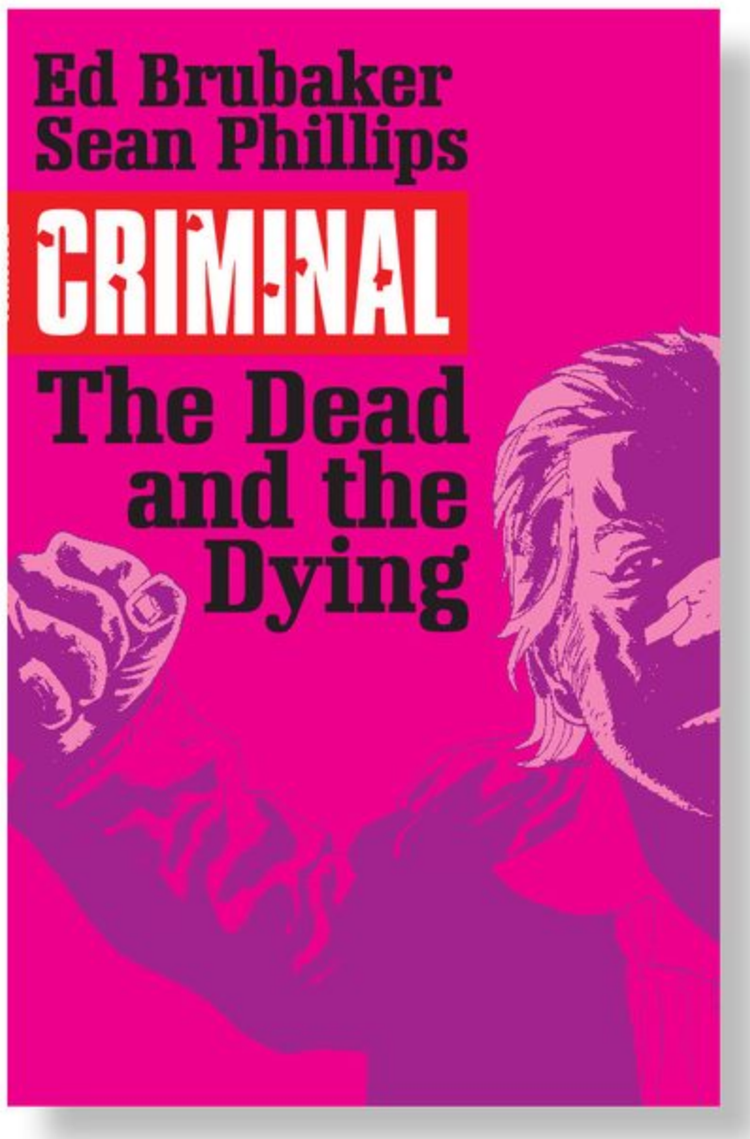
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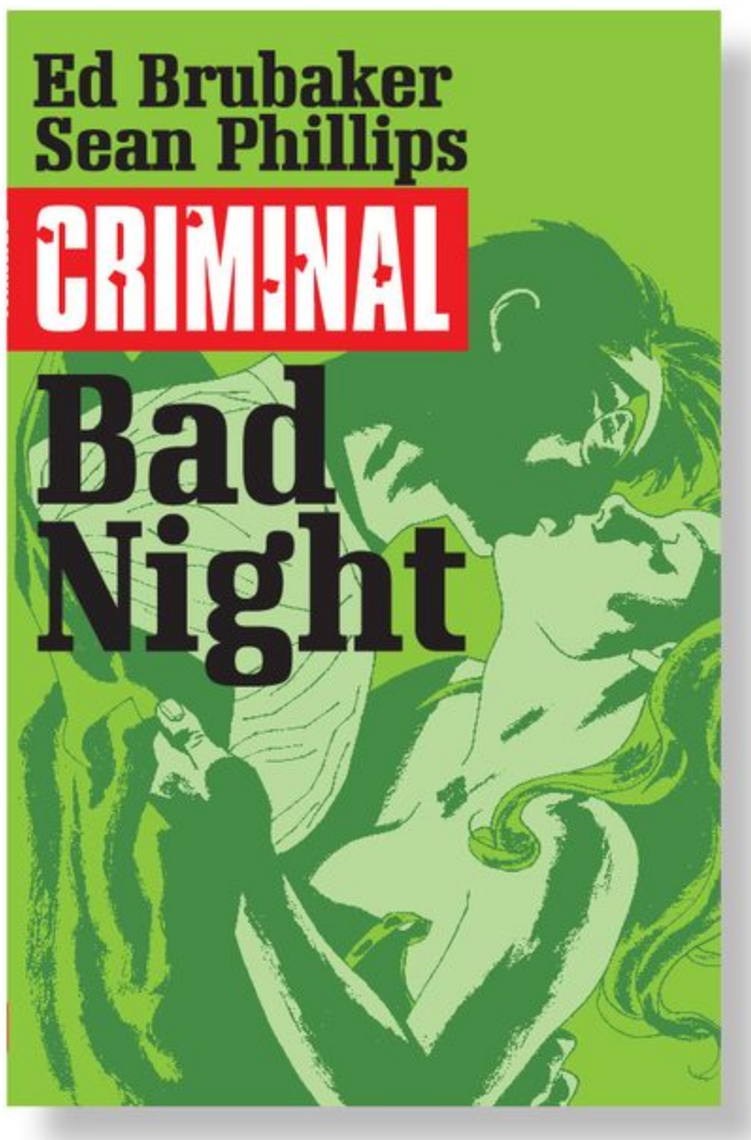
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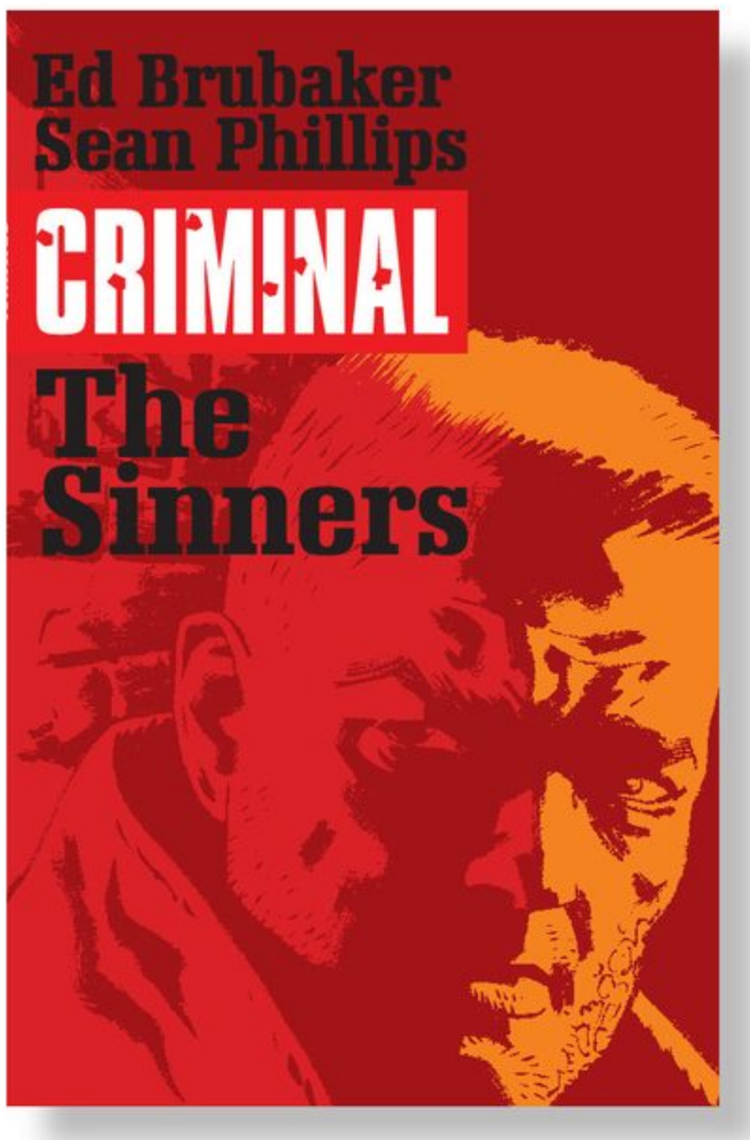
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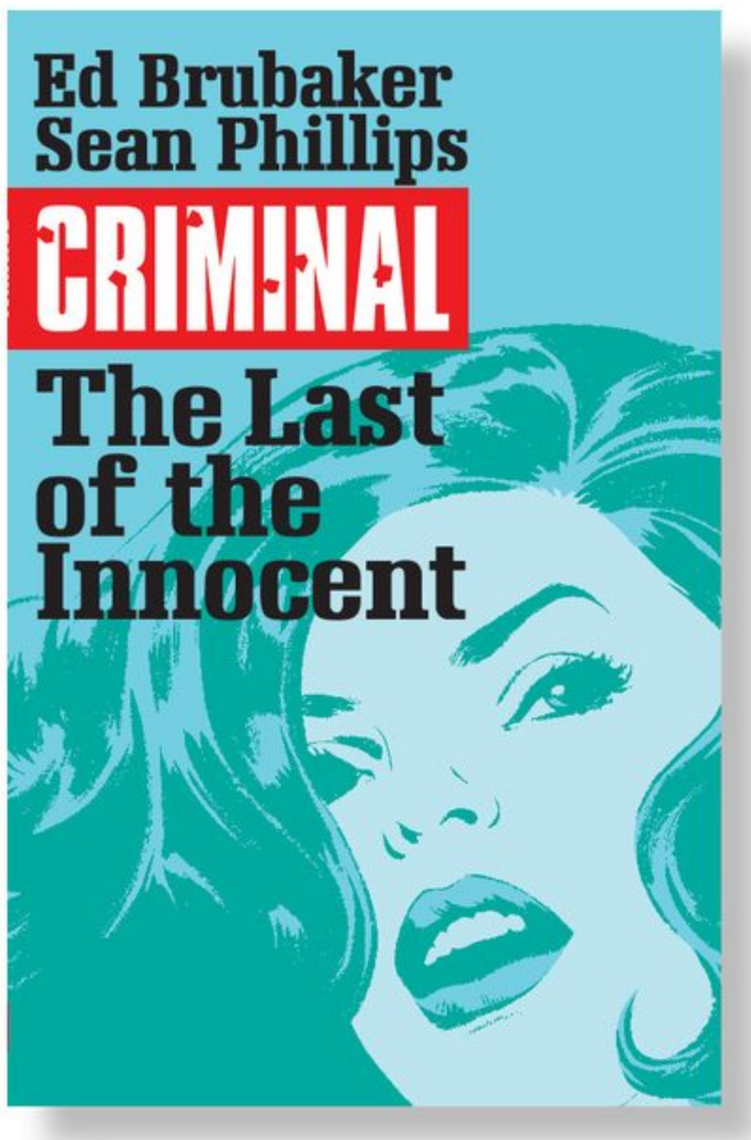
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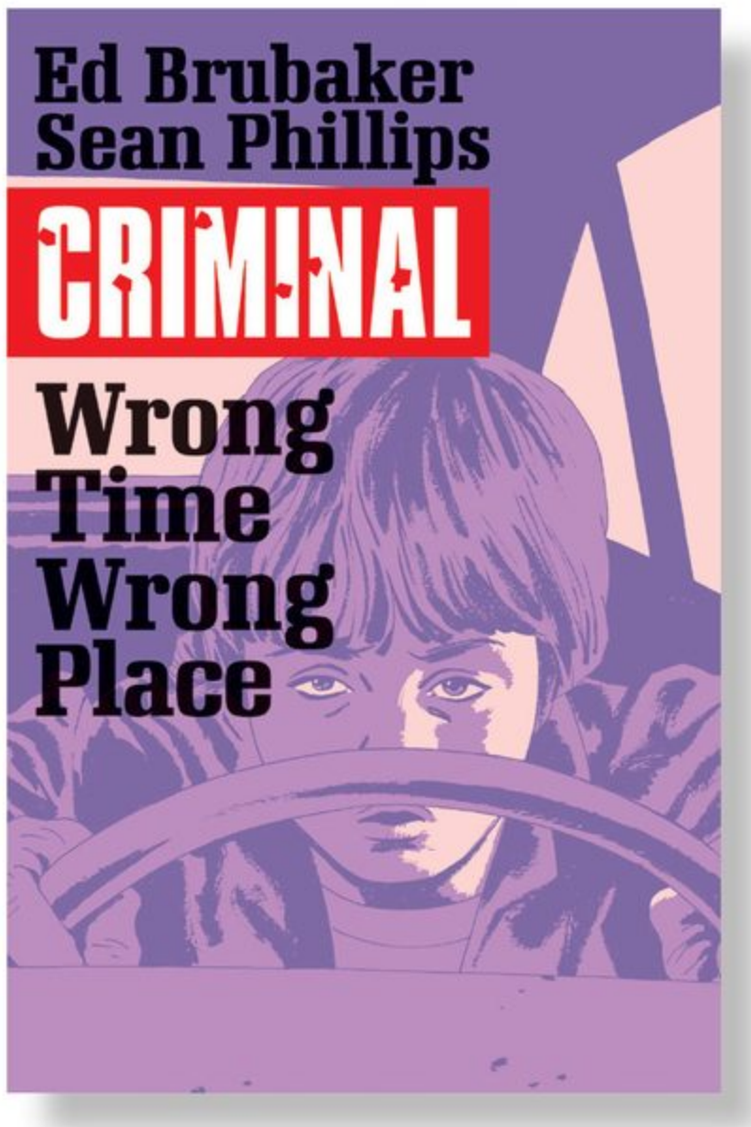
The Last of the Innocent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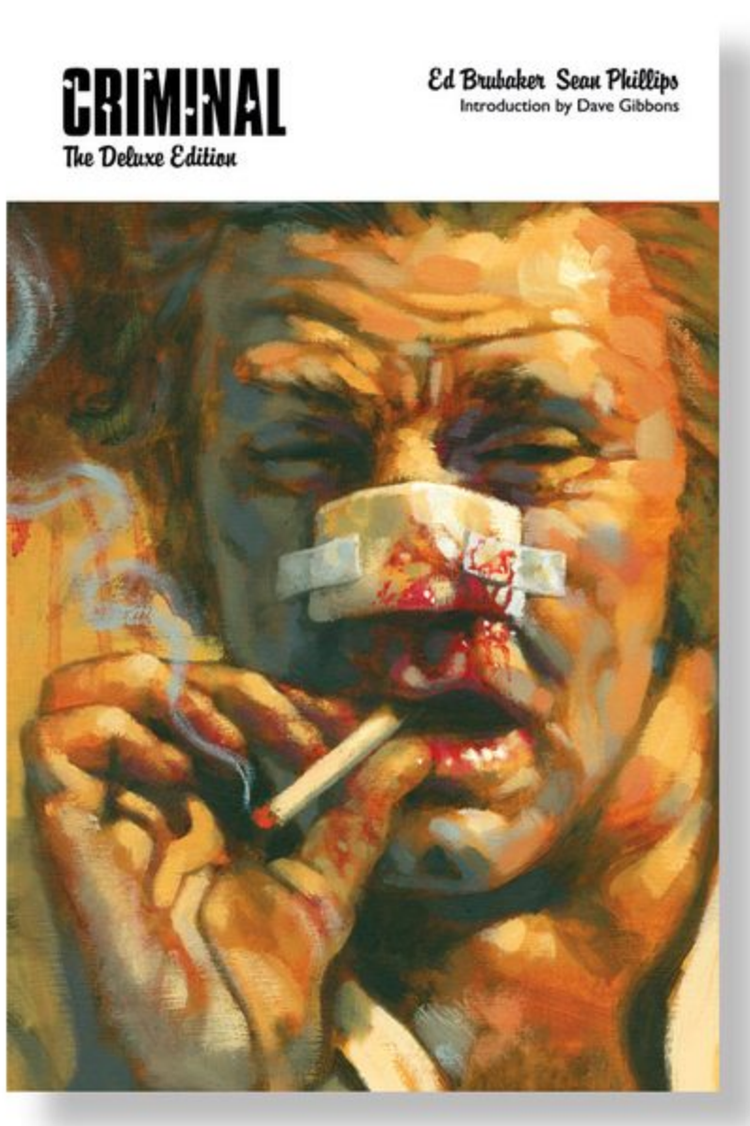
Wrong Time Wrong Place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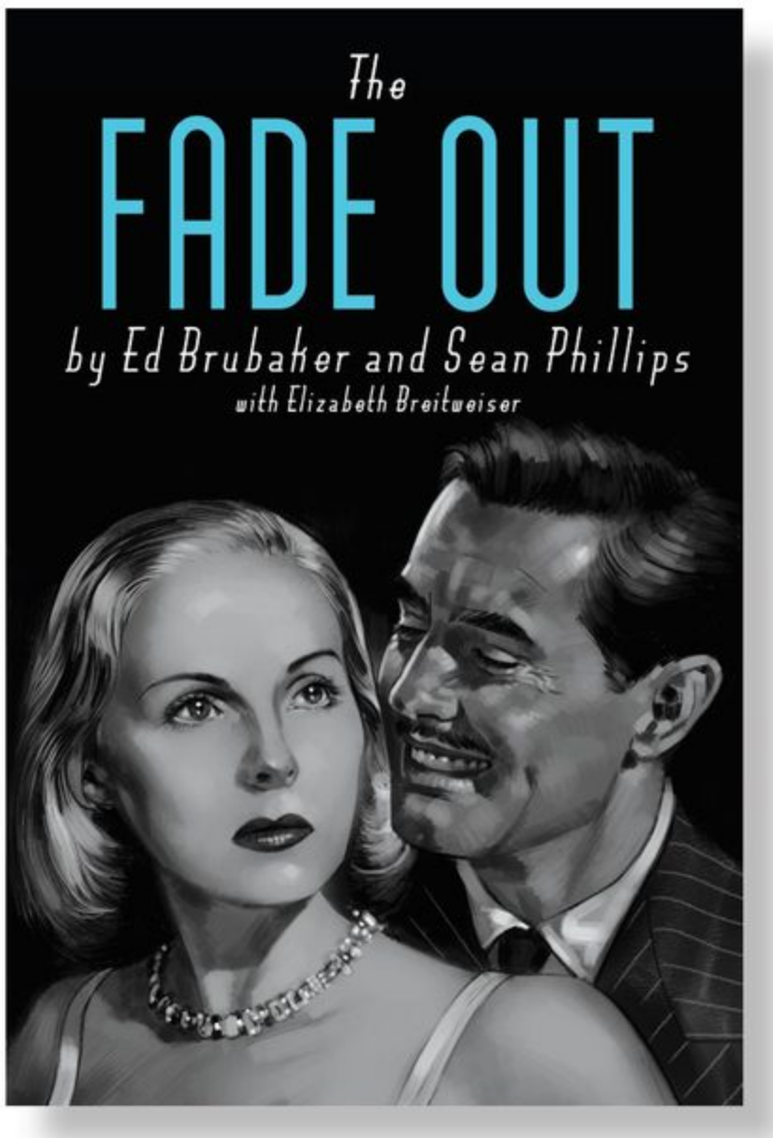

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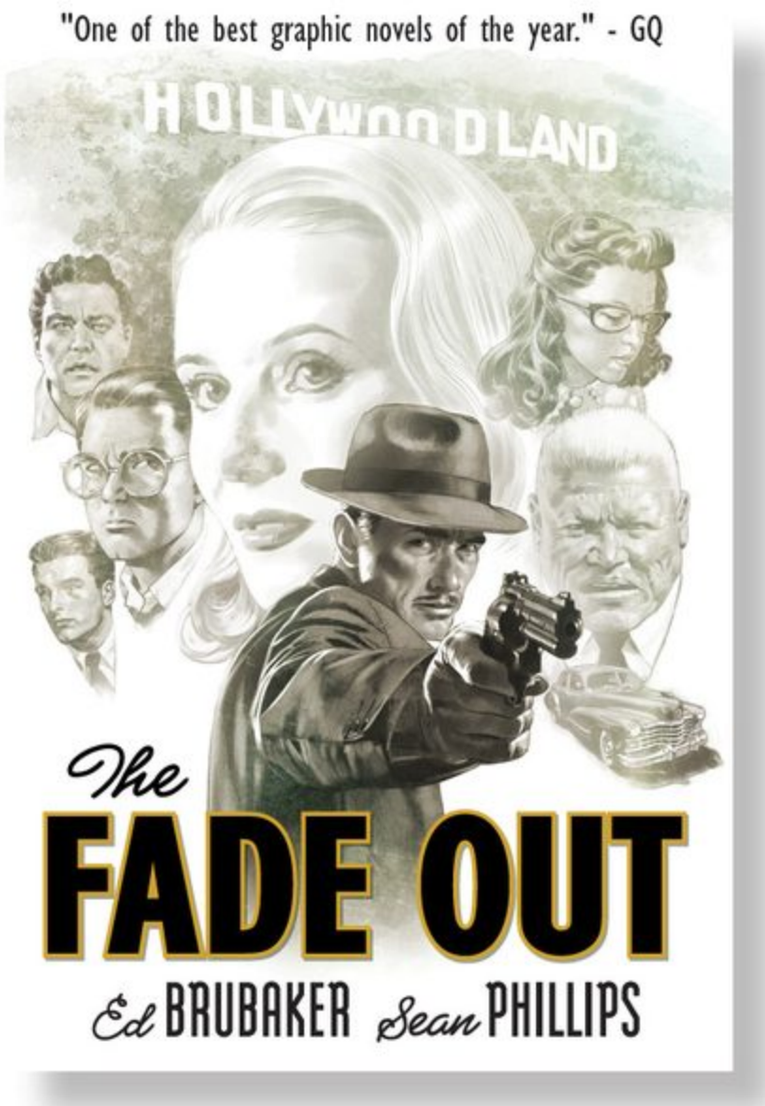

"One of comics dream teams delivers their best story yet in THE FADE OUT, an old Hollywood murder mystery draped against HUAC and the Red Scare."
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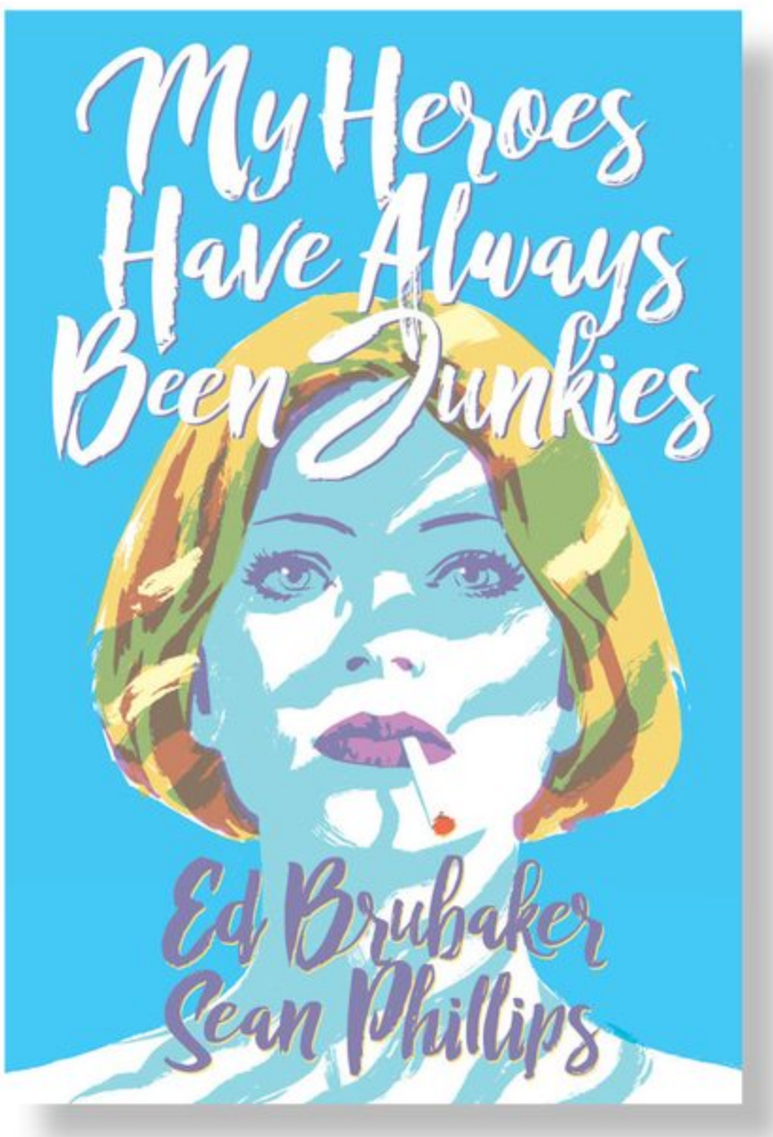

Newsweek's Best Comic Books of 2018
Thrillist's Best Comics & Graphic Novels of 2018
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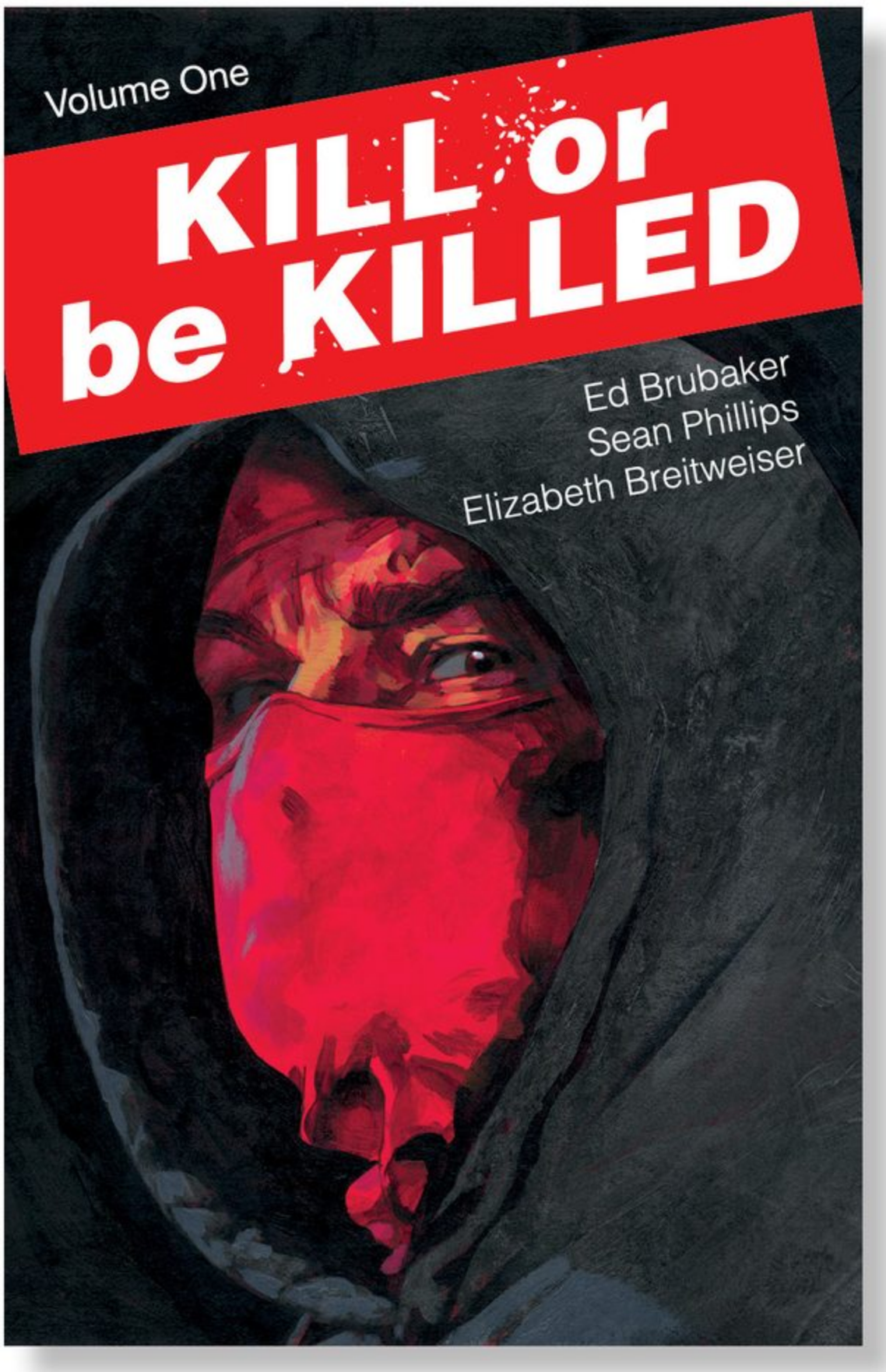
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KILL or be KILLED
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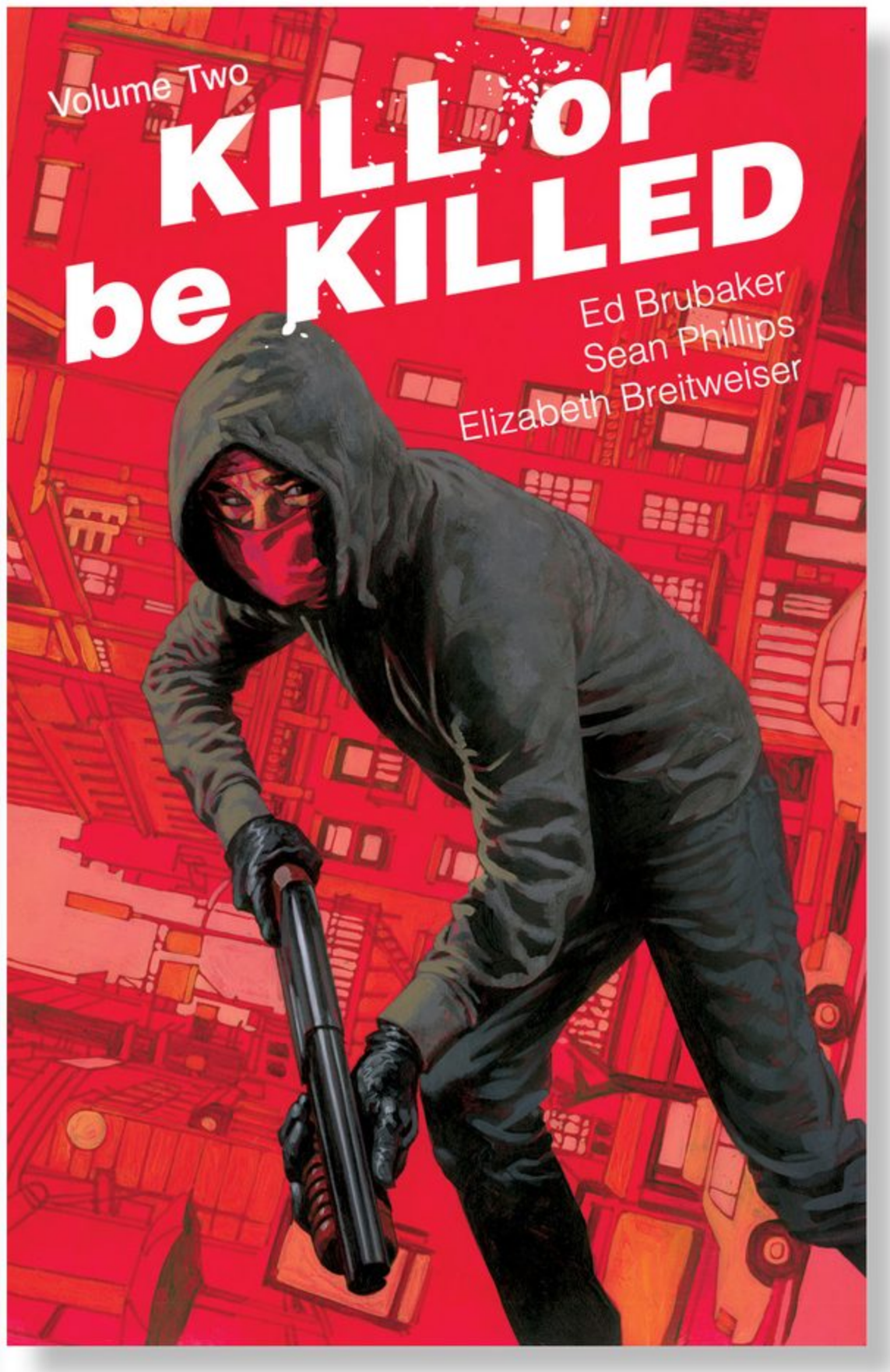
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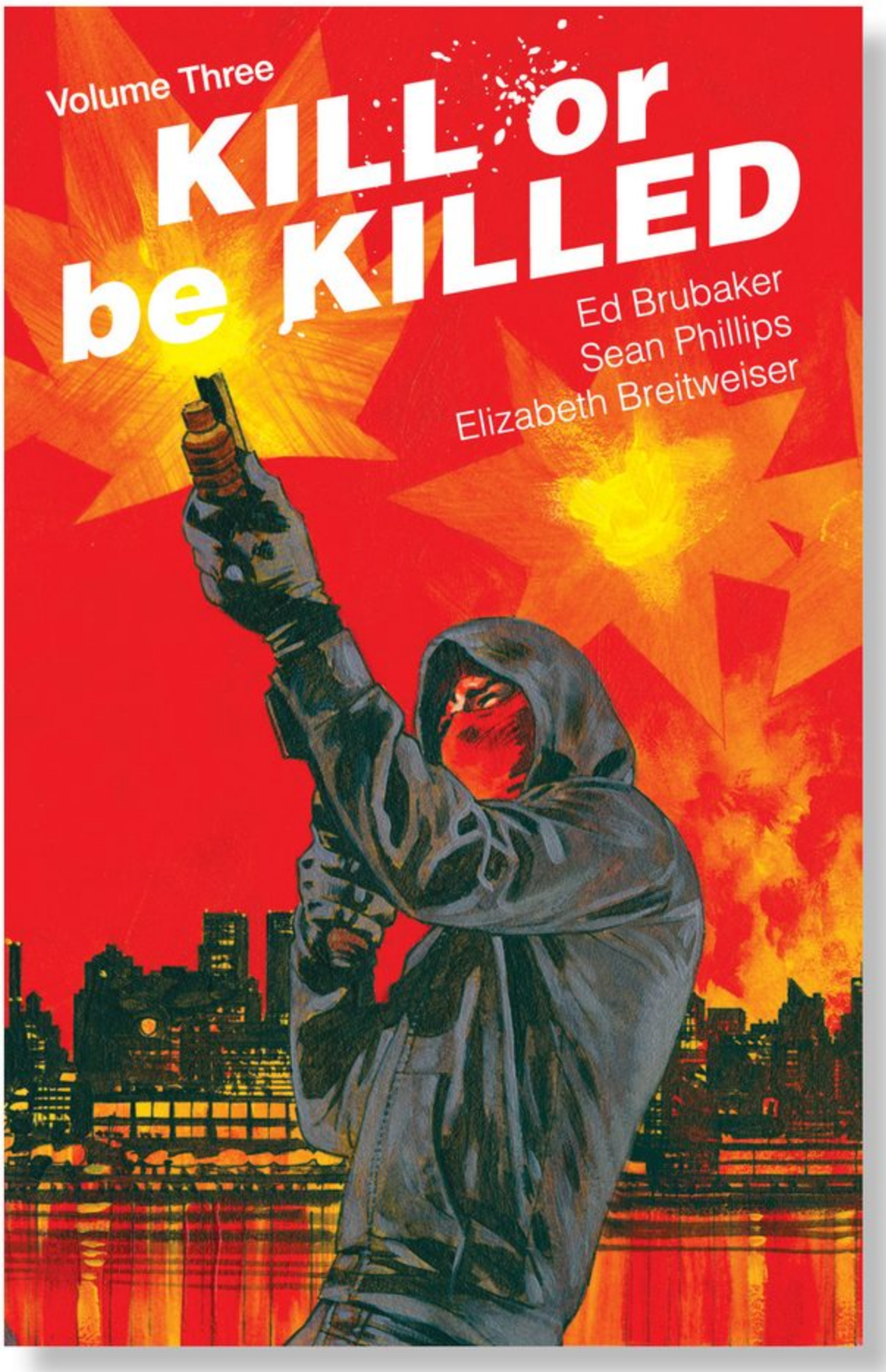
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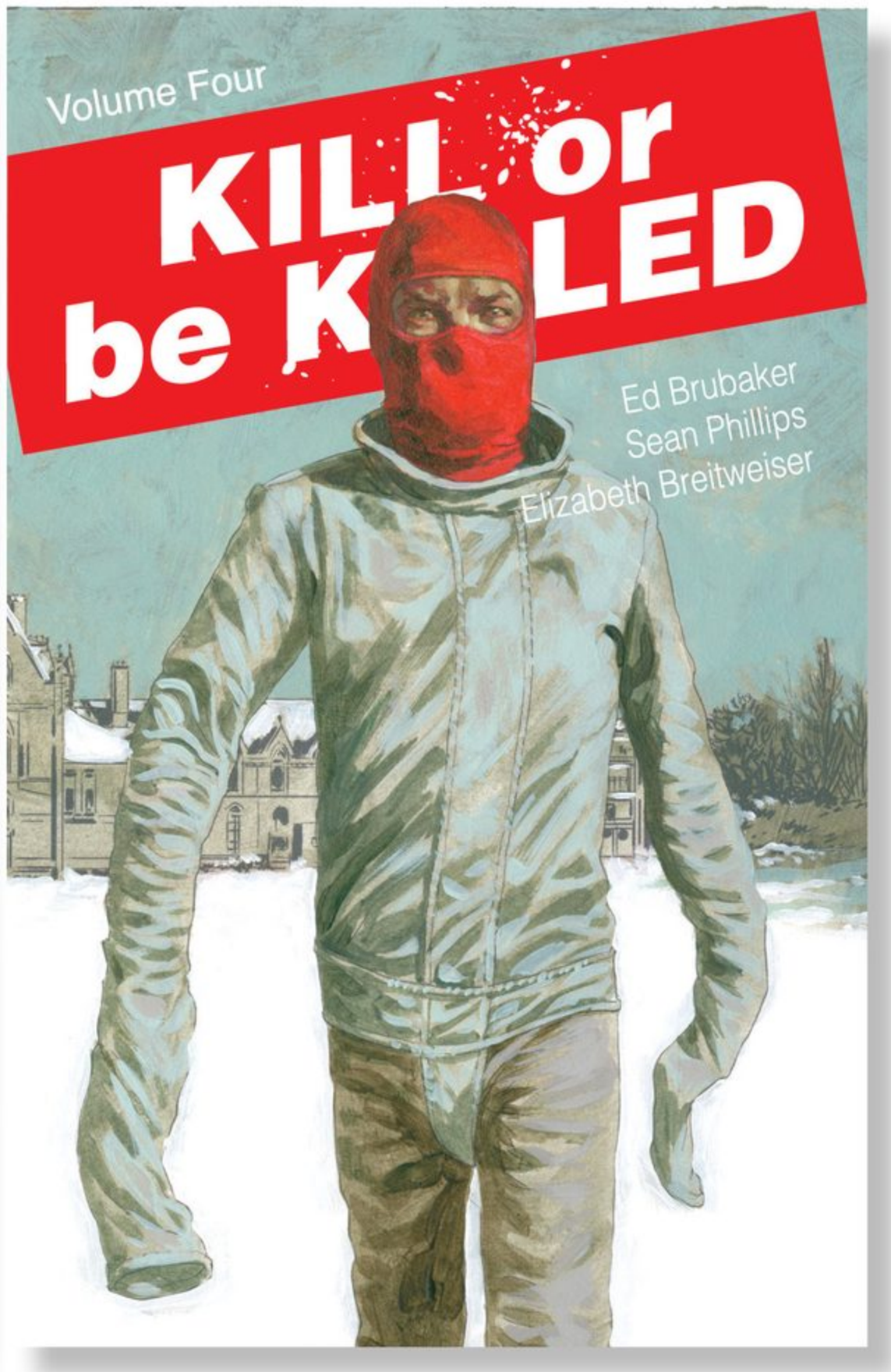
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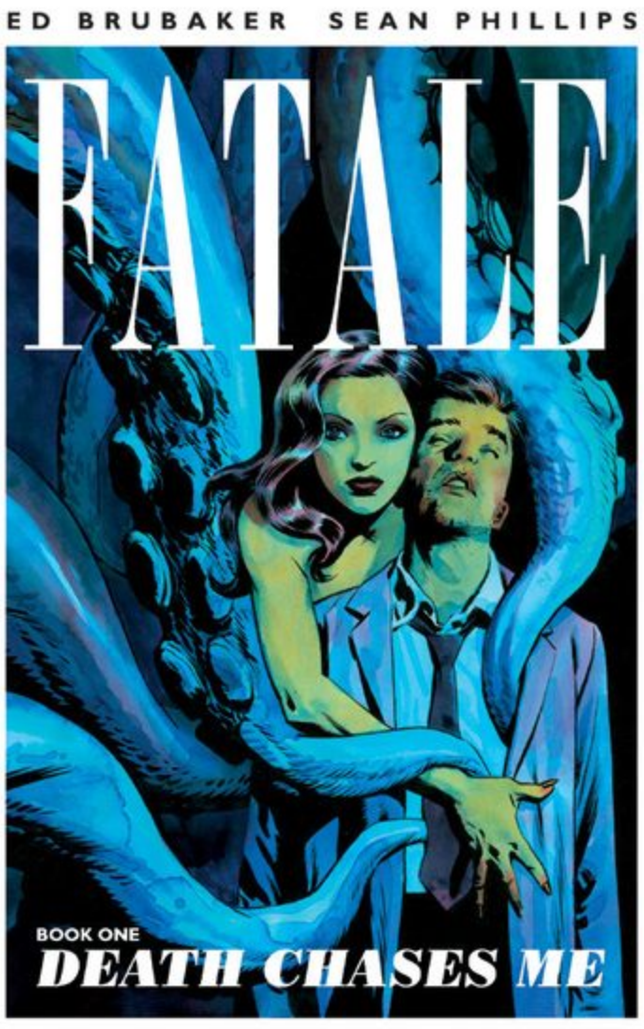

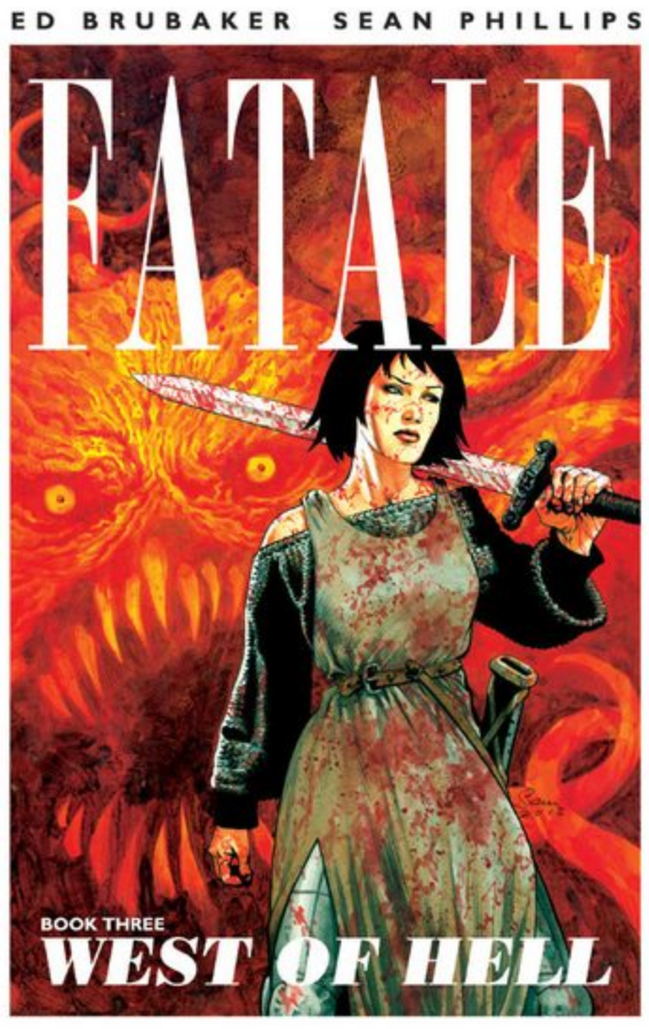

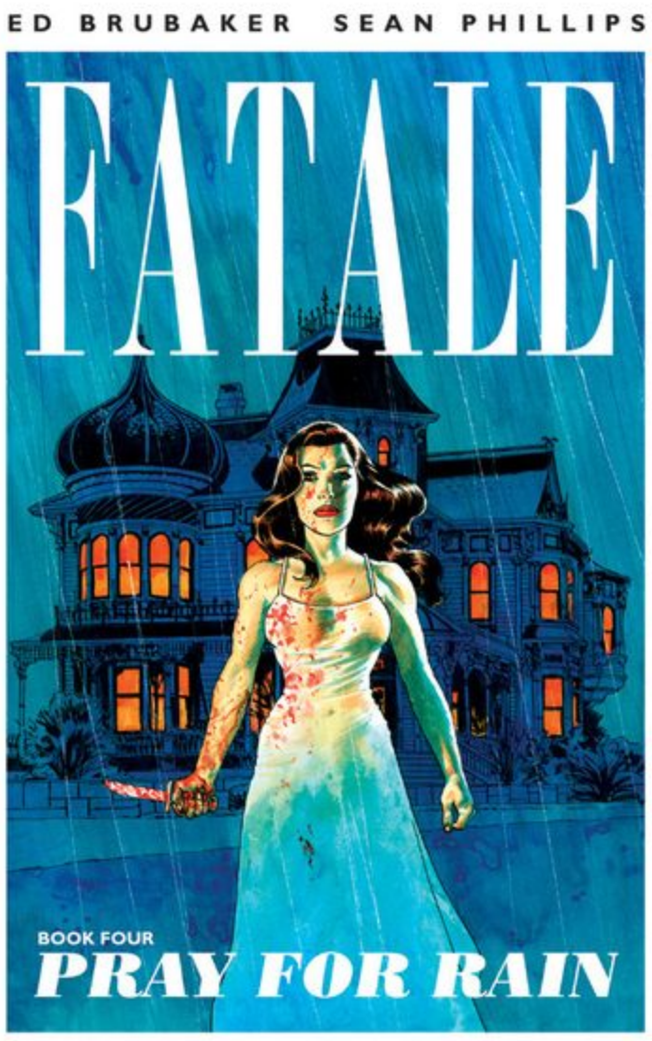

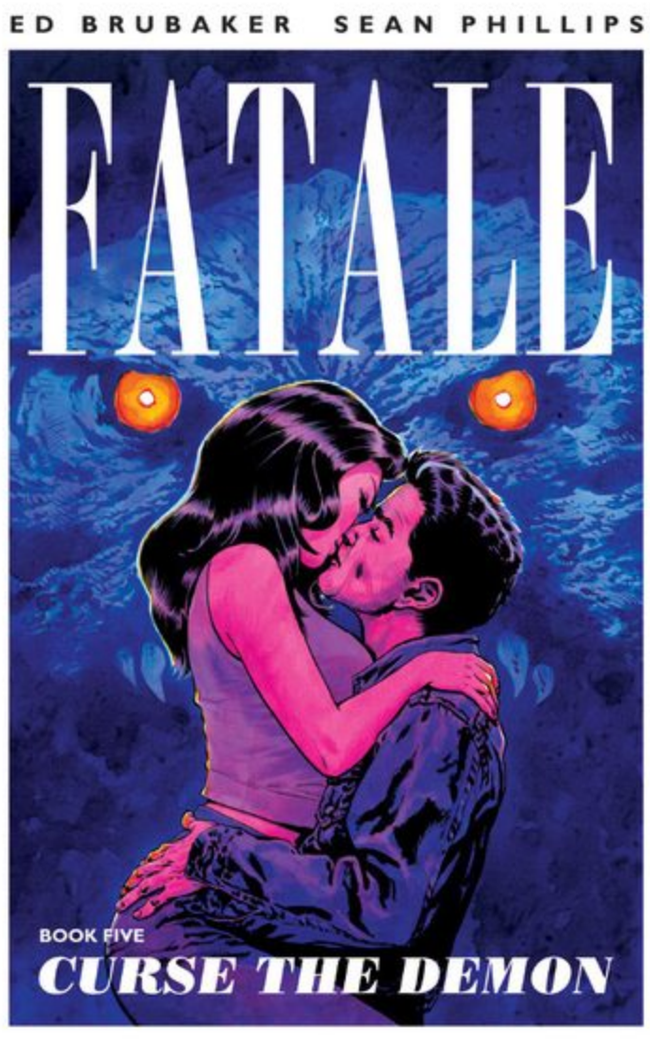

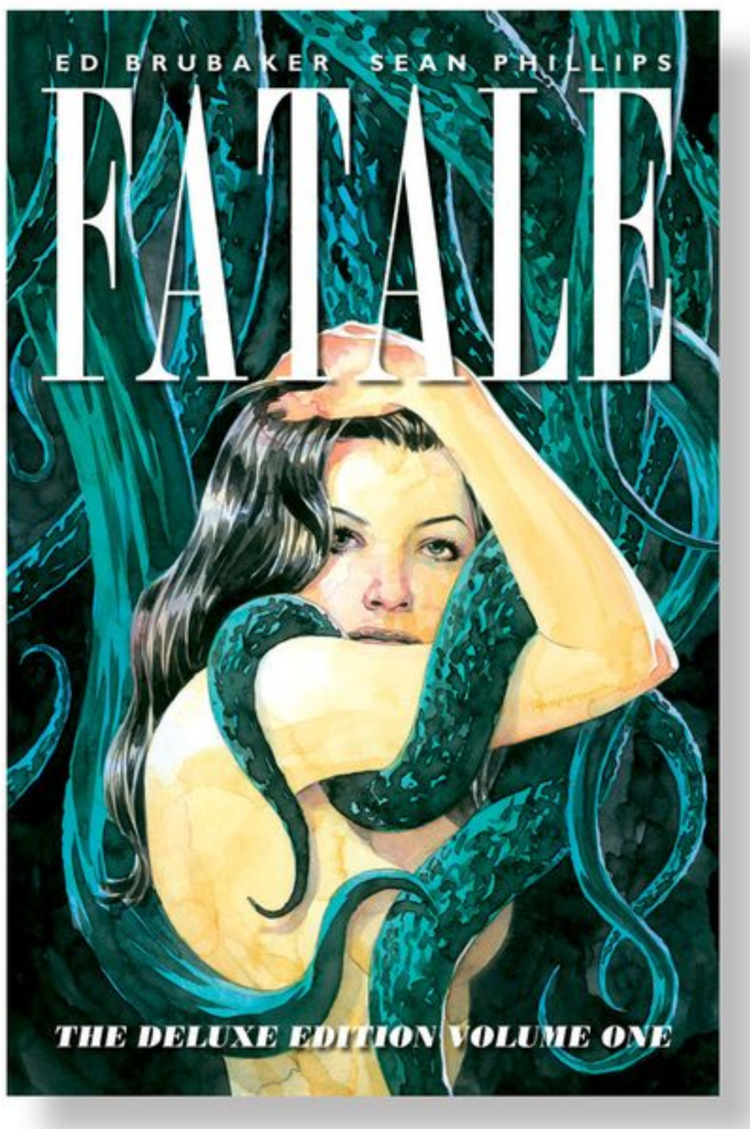

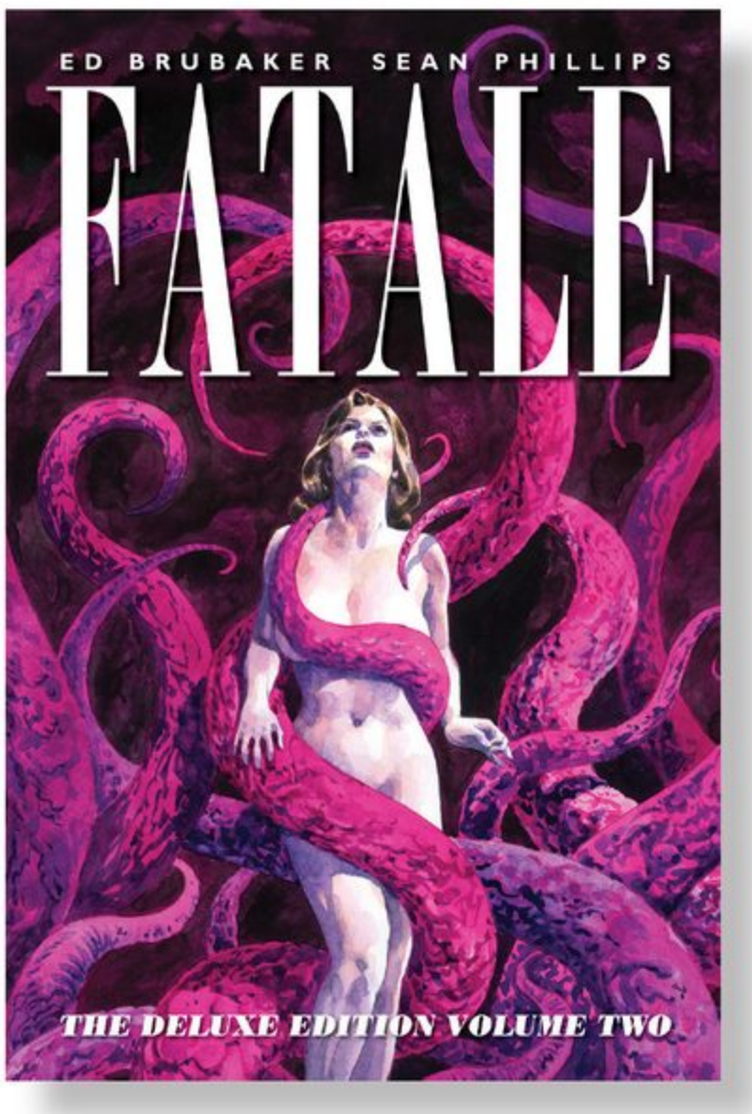

"Immortality may be a double-edged sword, but it's one the intoxicating Jo wields with a boundless grace in this addictive page-turner."
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Number Seven

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